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A Different History

Meg Mooney
non affiliated

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MEG MOONEY

A different history

1.

We lose the old track in places
loop around bloodwood trees, witchetty bush
til we find the faint tyre marks again
finally go over a high dune to the lake
that has appeared like a lost story
a great silvery sheet stretched between red dunes
where normally there's just rusty soil, mulga, coolabah trees

as we stand looking at all that water
the strangeness of flotillas of ducks
awkward shapes of egrets in gum trees
my friend points out an old windmill
tells me that when people came –
or were taken –to the big community
there was too much fighting
so the old people brought their families
and all the young men here, back near their country

recently I found a booklet a woman I knew wrote –
she's passed away now, too young –
in the story, she's a child riding horses and camels
collecting bush tomatoes with her friends
knocking down budgies (to eat) with pieces of barbed wire

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then her family moves here, to Lampara
'Lampara was a good place', she wrote

but sometimes the older men went and got grog
and there was strife here too, my friend tells me now

2.

we don't want to leave
the clean crimson shore
with spreads of coolabah shade
but head off along the lake
watch it disappear behind us

catch another old track, more of a creek now
the troopies crawl in and out of it to avoid thickets of wattles
the schoolkids scream out when they see kalinykalinypa
break off the big yellow spikes, suck the honey from them
and the little red bell-flowers of ngarrankura

everyone is happy car-walking along this track
it feels like we've slipped back with the old people
roaming familiar country, feasting in these good times
I can almost hear them laughing